

39 Ways to Save Money in China



Introduction

When I moved to China I lived in Beijing for about 3 and a half months. I made a good salary but when I moved to Hohhot I had literally nothing to show for it. I also didn't think this was a problem.

In America I had no concept of saving or future planning (for retirement, vacation or anything except the next phone). I always wondered how certain people seemed to find the money to take a trip to Thailand or Europe yet I was always at square one. I was simply making about 82 small mistakes when it came to saving money.

In the past 2 years I have made it my goal to see the world and money is a big part of that. It has led to quite a few calls of “cheapskate”, I sit out several expensive lunches and dinners with friends and I always have to ask “what does it cost?” before I commit to anything. All of it has been worth it to have an ever increasing bank account that gives me the freedom to travel as I feel during my breaks.

In just 28 months I have traveled to Xian, Datong, Beijing, Shanghai, Thailand, Cambodia (twice), Japan (twice), back home for break, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Italy, Switzerland, France and Vietnam (I know I'm forgetting a few) with no end in sight.

Life is most definitely meant to be lived and, no, money isn't everything but money is freedom. Money is freedom to shop where you want, wear what you want, eat what you want, travel where you want and no one can question anything you do because it is with your money.

Living in China will set you up for a middle class lifestyle and the ability to put 60%+ of your salary in the bank every single month. You won't be a millionaire but you will be free.

Financial Independence

Financial Independence is the simple idea of maximizing your income and preparing for the future with the goal of creating passive income to retire comfortably on. At the heart of this is saving every bit of money you can.

We spend so much of our money needlessly either on incremental costs (over-expensive phone plans, media subscriptions), excessive luxury spending (movie tickets, expensive dinners, Starbucks) or unwise personal purchases (bow and arrow set, tattoos, Playstation 4).

Attacking even one of these types of money wasters will create an immediate effect on your take home salary at the end of the day. Stupid foreigner nature is to roll this saved money to another stupid purchase but instead we will advocate attacking every sector possible and SAVING THE MONEY!

I will not cover investments specifically but this book will provide a practical base for your new life.

About the Author

Steven left for China shortly after his 28th birthday with just a few hundred dollars and has turned it into a lazy career. Steven is an ESL teacher and world traveler for almost 3 years and he makes videos as “The Culture Bum” about his life in China, teaching and travel highlights. He lives in Hohhot, China in the Inner Mongolia Province and has taught kindergarten, private school, university and public high school while in China.

Food and night life



Eat like a local (and find your spot)

China has a few tiers of restaurants. These tiers separate price and style of food but also how many people are meant to eat there. I'll simply call them 1 and 2 to be simple but there are a dozen more.

Tier 1 Chinese restaurants look a lot like Chinese restaurants in the US. They are brightly colored in Red and gold, maybe there are statues and dragons out front and inside are fish tanks, dozens of wait staff, sometimes an open kitchen, etc. Far too often I see foreigners flock to these places because they think this is what a Chinese restaurant looks like so this is where I go.



The problem is these restaurants are designed for large parties of 3 or more. The menus will have an item such as deep fried mushroom or an egg based soup with vegetables for what seems like normal US prices (45-60 RMB or \$7-10) but the portions will be at least 4 times what you expected. It is literally impossible to comfortably finish one of these meals on your own. These are traditional Chinese meal types that are meant to be shared around the table for a large group

Instead stick to the tier 2 restaurants. You pass these hole in the wall shacks with menus printed on the wall and a staticky television in the corner at least a dozen times a day and odds are there is one at the bottom of your apartment complex. They will usually specialize in either rice or noodles so make up your mind what sounds good today. Meals are usually less than 14 RMB for a big plate of rice, vegetables and a little meat or similar noodle dishes. This is perfect for a few laowais who don't want to share their meal or just a lonely night between prepping for classes.

The other restaurant type I want to mention would be “mix you face” places such as Malatang or Dry Pot. This is where you fill up a container with raw produce, noodles and meats from a rack and they cook it in a sauce for you, usually into a thick type of soup. I love these places but don't let your eyes be larger than your stomach when your grabbing your ingredients.

Cook at home

As cheap as restaurant food is in China it is even easier to cook at home. Two big bags of vegetables will cost you 20 RMB at most and if you can cook in even the most beginner of ways, using staples such as rice and potatoes with a little brocolli, carrots, meat or tofu you can eat for pennies a day and cooking is a great skill to develop with your free time.

Don't buy imported Produce

Imported produce items at the grocery store can easily be double the price of local grown items. When your only buying a bunch of bananas it is no big deal but I've walked out of stores with 2 bags of groceries only for my wife to point out I overspent by 40-50 RMB. Try and buy local, you'll know by which one is half the price.

Save napkins as TP

Unlike most Western nations toilet paper is not a guarantee in Chinese bathrooms (or Cambodia, Thailand, Mongolia, etc.). It is an absolute must that you carry a pack of toilet tissues with you at all times for emergency reasons (the diet has a tendency to digest fast). If for any reason a restaurant offers tissues its not a bad idea to grab a handful and stuff it in the tiny pocket of your bag. I hate buying tissue, accidentally leaving it at home and then having to buy a whole new box.

Shop at Wet Markets

Near your home will be a wet market, likely several of them, a small produce market run by an old married couple. They are cramped, with way too many products including basic vegetables, most fruits, tofu, oil and sauces, toilet paper, packaged snacks, nuts, kitchen products and tons more. The food prices found at these markets will be just cheaper enough to warrant making the stop vs. going to a grocery store.

After a few weeks you'll have a friend for life and they will toss in bits and bobs for free like a few oranges or a handful of sunflower seeds, buying water in bulk will shave a few RMB off and in general you'll find a few extra bucks in your pocket after a week.



NO TIPPING

China is not a tipping nation for haircuts, taxi rides, servers, etc. I've honestly had taxi drivers throw money back at me in annoyance. It is seen as pity money. Just smile, say thank you and go on your way.



Bring your own chopsticks and tissue

Small restaurants will provide you with napkins (sometimes its just a toilet paper roll on a table) but the larger restaurants do not. In fact they tease you and put an unopened box of tissue on the table without telling you that if you crack the seal it'll be 2-6 RMB. Same goes for the shrink wrapped set of plates, bowls, cups and chop sticks. Us foreigners are unaware but this adds 10 RMB to every restaurant meal easily.

I never leave home without my own chopsticks and a box of tissues in my bag.

Split tableware when possible. If you are out with another person you can share the plates and bowls (you usually get 1 plate and 2 bowls) and save a little bit. Maybe don't try this on a date.

BYOB

Most restaurants and bars in China (NOT CLUBS) are very lax when it comes to bringing in outside food and drinks. I've walked into restaurants with open bottles of wine, 12 packs of beer and even my own tub of noodles. I'm afraid I'm a cheap bastard and I take advantage of this regularly.



A cheap, watered down Chinese beer will run you 10-25 RMB at a bar/BBQ/restaurant while a hearty foreign beer can go anywhere from 30-100 RMB easily. I will go to a local liquor store and pick up a bottle of wine for 20-25 RMB and drink that openly while we play some cards. It may be tacky but it saves me at least 100 RMB every time.

Avoid overpriced package produce

This tip can be used in every country.

Just don't buy packaged produce. Chopped up apples and carrots stuffed into a plastic bin with triple the cost slapped on. It takes minutes to wash, peel and cut fruit and vegetables, don't be lazy.

Freeze fruit

Produce in China can be shockingly cheap and shockingly expensive all in the same trip to the grocery store. In and out of season makes all the difference. When fruit such as strawberries is in season and runs you 10-20 RMB for a kilo buy gigantic bags of it and store it in the freezer before it can go bad. I am able to have strawberry smoothies all winter long for pennies.



Transportation



Learn the bus schedules

Taking a taxi will usually run you 12-30 RMB vs. a bus which is 1 RMB, 2 RMB if you have to transfer. I take the bus more than anybody else I know and it saves me at least 60 RMB a week. Not only that but it gives me a much more intimate view of not only my city but anywhere I go. When I traveled to Xian I became lost but using my bus skills I still find my way back to the hotel in 10 minutes.

The first step is to SAVE EVERY ADDRESS YOU EVER GET! I use Evernote and sync it with my Google Accounts so I always have these addresses. These come in handy over and over and over.



Electronic mall: 诚信数码广场

The second step is to copy and paste the address into Baidu Maps which you can download from your browser using Bing or any search engine or in the Google Play or Apple App stores. Pasting the address will easily find it.



Finally at the top of the menu will be several options in Chinese. The second option will give you turn by turn directions that you can use in a car or a bike and the third option will give you a listing for the buses that will take you to your destination. It is up to you to figure out which side of the street to stand on though.

路线

专车

驾车

公交

步行

骑行

10月22日 17:51出发

推荐路线

58路

40分钟

13站 · 6.5公里 · 步行556米

五二零三工厂站上车

最快

71路/303路 → 76路/26路

46分钟

11站 · 6.6公里 · 步行508米

兴泰名居住宅区站上车

73路/32路 → 76路/26路

48分钟

13站 · 6.5公里 · 步行555米

Buy a bike

Taking the buss definitely separates you from most foreigners in China but go one step further and get a bicycle! It give you a lot of “get up and go” freedom, its free (except when it breaks), and provides a lot of exercise which some of us need more than others.

Don't buy a new bike, it will get stolen. A new bike can cost 300-600 RMB depending on a few bells and whistles OR you can buy a used bike with a little paint chipped off, for 100-200. Not only is it cost effective but your bike will be at the bottom of the “steal” pile when you park it at the mall.



Buy E-bike (and lock it)

If your going to be living in China for more than 6 months it is in your best interest to pick up an E-bike. Imagine a bicycle but it goes 4 times as fast and allows you to cover way more ground in a single day. My E-bike has made going from job to job a breeze and saved me thousands on taxis (my different jobs were too far apart to make them all on a regular bike). If I have to run across town, covering 14 KM in 70 minutes a pedal bike won't cut it but the E-bike is nothing but make sure you lock it up.



Carry spare bike parts

I've busted plenty of tires. Potholes, speed bumps, glass all over the road, etc. A tiny leak left unchecked will shred an inner tube in no time.

You will see bike fixing/key making/shoe repair on every other corner in most cities (tier-1 only on the outskirts usually). Fixing bikes is a nice little corner business for a lot of older and retired men in China. Getting a new inner tube at these guys truck will run you anywhere from 30-40 RMB but that includes the price of the inner tube itself.

I've gotten into the habit of always having a spare inner tube (which costs 3-4 RMB) and they'll put it on my bike for 5 RMB so a total cost of 8-9 RMB vs. 30-40.

Don't use black (illegal/unmarked) taxis

This is mostly an issue in larger cities but black taxis are very common. Before Uber came along average Joe's in big cities would buy a little red light to hang from their mirror and offer rides to hailing passengers.

I've taken my fair share of black taxis, after a late night on the outskirts of town with no legit taxis in sight, and regretted every single one. They will hassle you and charge a minimum of 3 times the real cost of the fare. Safety does become an issue when they have buddies (or prostitutes) riding shotgun with them.

With Uber and several other ride sharing apps gaining popularity there is almost no reason to resort to this overpriced and dodgy practice.



Double up (share) taxis but keep track of the fare

Taxi drivers in smaller, tier-2 cities in China are more likely to try to fill their taxi up with 2 or 3 passengers at a time when it is busy (or raining). You can absolutely use this to your advantage and split your fare in half, but, you have to keep track of the meter. It is no secret taxi drivers will do whatever they can to bleed a little more out of you, especially if you are a foreigner.

If the meter is 10 when you get in, they drop off a passenger when the meter is at 18 and then you get out at 25, you should only pay 15 RMB. Most drivers will insist that you pay the full 25 but just have exact change ready. Hand it over and get out of the car without saying a word.

Have a preferred route to show taxi driver

In my city I have to take 1 taxi a week because I have classes scheduled within about 45 minutes of each other but on opposite ends of town. The drivers can either take a route through the city for 25 RMB or they can loop around on the highway bringing it up to easily 40+ RMB. I have a very direct translated message saved in my phone giving detailed direction and stating I will not pay if they get on the looping highway.

Get a transit card

All cities in China will have a transit card available. These are cards you put money onto (I always put on at least a hundred because I know I will use it) that can be swiped for easy entrance on buses and subways. I've found myself waiting for the bus many times with not a single 1 RMB in my pocket so I have to go buy a water or something that I don't really need to break that bill. Transit cards make life a lot easier.

Find out what other uses your city has for the transit cards. Some cities allow you to use a transit card as a deposit for a rent-a-bike, to enter parks and amusement parks or even pay a discounted fee for the bus or subway.

Travel inside China

China has a lot of holidays: Spring Festival in February, Golden Week in October, May Day week, little odds and ends here and there and if you teach for a high school or university you can expect 3-5 months of paid vacation a year. Since your already in a foreign region of the world your likely going to be enticed to go see Japan, South Korea, Thailand, etc. But don't underestimate what China itself has to offer.

China is a little larger than the US. Travel by train and bus is incredibly cheap in comparison to international flights, visas, airport taxis, etc. And since your already accustomed to living and life in China you'll be able to navigate the food and accomodations in a way to save a lot more money than somewhere abroad you've never been.

There are many distinct cultural regions with their own religion, cuisine, customs and even languages. You can spend years traveling around the country by train and never scratch the surface. Life is long and patience is a virtue. I plan 1 vacation outside of China and 1 inside every year.



Take trains when traveling in China

Compared to most of the world the US is not a train-centric country. We drive or we fly and it is easy to understand when Amtrak costs so damn much and isn't exactly fast. This is not the case in China.

The train system in China is incredibly well built up and you can get anywhere in the country by train (it just might take a while depending on where your going) and it is pretty cheap. A train from Hohhot to Beijing is only about 120 RMB vs. a plane ticket which can be 700-900. The time difference (8 hours vs. 1) is noticeable but there are always sleeper trains that run at night with a small, cramped, hot bunk.

I never said it was comfortable but it is damn cheap.

Ask your coworkers or friends to help you compare prices.



Learn where to buy plane tickets

I always pay less (sometimes half) what my friends do for plane tickets. Going to Cambodia, Japan, back home, etc. is one of the best opportunities to save large sums of money when traveling. The difference is patience and knowing your resources.

Flight bundler websites like Expedia, Skyscanner and C-Trip make it easy to buy your tickets and easily filter for time and duration. When it comes to price, however, they are not the best websites for prices. If traveling in or flying out of China there are Chinese specific websites that list smaller airlines that can save you money.

Qunar.com is the largest and most well known however the English Language portal is not nearly as robust as the Chinese. You will need a Chinese friend to help translate and process everything but you can look at saving \$100+ on any international flight you take using this service.

If you want to get really pinch pennies you can search individual airline company websites. Every country has its own “budget” airline. In the United States it is Spirit Airlines, Japan has Peach, China has Spring Airlines, etc.. These are puddle jumper flights, maximum of 4 hours usually, with no amenities. No food, no in flight entertainment or meals, bad seats, late night arrivals but CHEAP CHEAP FLIGHTS!

If your flying from Tokyo to Bangkok check for budget airlines out of Japan (such as Peach Airlines) and Thailand. There are even sister city deals such as Spring Airlines in China has flights going from Hohhot to Nagoya, Japan for less than \$120 most days and then its just a \$30 bus ride to Tokyo or wherever you want to be.

Take your time and do your research to find the best deals available to free up the money for a jet ski rental for when you land in paradise.

Shopping



Avoid Western clothing brands

A newly located Westerner to China made the comment a few days ago he would never buy clothes in China because they are too expensive. We all laughed. It is true that if you go to the mall brands like Nike, North Face and Polo will be roughly the same (maybe even a little more) than they would cost back in America or Europe and with China salaries it makes no sense to spend the money.

That is why you want to embrace the jankiness and go to whatever local bootleg clothing market is in your city. They may not have Nike but there are plenty of selections of Bake shoes for 150 RMB or less. Sketchers cost 800 RMB but these Skyrans are practically free!

I've never had a major complaint about the quality and some, such as a winter shoe brand called Telent, are actually a bit better then their Western counterparts. When in Rome and such.



Don't buy knockoff electronics

I am always looking for presents to bring home back to the United States for my family. Something you can't really get in the US or maybe just something that is much cheaper. A cashmere sweater in Inner Mongolia is about a quarter the price it would be in the US.

China is also known for very cheap electronics. Not Samsung phones, Sony televisions or Apple computers, those are all the same price as it would be in the US, maybe even more expensive. No we're talking about knockoff garbage that got spit out the “defective” pile. You'll be lucky if your Mommy headphones make it out of the store and while they only cost 15 RMB you don't want to go back every 3 days for a new pair.

When it comes to electronics, a pricey purchase that needs to last, shell out the money.

Apartment Life



No pets

I will try my best not to be grim with this.

I have lived in China for 2 years and I've seen a few people get pets. Dogs, cats, ducks, fish, etc. Not to be stereotypical but its usually the ladies.

I understand, your lonely, maybe you had pets growing up and your used to a collar jangling through the house, but this is a bad idea for so many reasons.

Since this is about saving money I have to point out that dog food costs a lot of money, sometimes as much as 300+ RMB a month if your getting the good stuff. Its likely you don't want little Rusty drinking tap water either so your water bill has increased. Vet visits aren't cheap either and that leads me to my big protest about foreigners getting pets.

They die. A lot. Like a lot a lot.

Your living in a foreign country, likely on your own, and your job must come first in most instances. This does not provide adequate time that a dog needs to play or that an animal like a duck needs to be fed and bathed properly. Pet sellers in China can be sketchy and often times your animal doesn't have the vaccinations that are claimed. It broke my heart seeing a friends dog die after just a month, after countless vet visits that forced her to miss a lot of work and spend a lot of money, the puppy could not beat Parvo.

Almost as bad is abandonment. You will likely go home. I wish I screenshotted all the instances of people begging other foreigners to take their animals that they've bonded with but can't take home for this reason or that. It is very selfish and costly to take on the responsibility of a pet when your wandering around foreign lands.



No plants

When I'm packing for my three week tour of wherever do I want to worry about who will water my half dead petunia?



Workout at home

Gym memberships are quite cheap in China, some as low as 100 RMB a YEAR for barebones “weights and nothing else” locations but don't underestimate the power of bodyweight fitness. Tae Bo, P90X, even Richard Simmons have been burning the pounds in your living room for decades. Use resources like <http://reddit.com/r/bodyweightfitness> to strengthen your core and save you some money.

And don't forget that bicycle you bought will get you doing 90 minutes a day of cardio.

Don't decorate your apartment

Say it with me: I'm going home. Or not. I mean I have no intention of going home. But I likely won't live where I currently live for that long. Even if you choose to stay in China (or wherever) for many years you'll bounce from job to job, school to school and apartment to apartment.

I know we all want to feel like we have a castle but be responsible. A few 10 RMB posters from the student market won't kill any one but don't invest the money to paint the walls, buy a television stand, new bed sheets, curtains, etc. Because you'll just be hawking this stuff in a wechat group for 1/10th the price a year later.

Don't damage your apartment! I've been in apartments where the resident laowai decided to paint and write all over the walls, destroy some furniture and generally not take care of the place. Fixing all that costs money and you will be the one to pay it no matter how much you swear you won't.

Common Sense



Stack your mao's

Chinese currency uses small brown bills and coins called “Mao” as fractioned RMB or cents. Most foreigners will discard them, let them crumple and rip up in an old pair of jeans and generally treat them as useless. When I first arrived in China I had no clue what they were, no one would take them (because I was offering them for far less than what my purchase was worth) and a friend informed me they were “useless” and he would take them off my hands as he gave them to his niece back home.

A few weeks later I saw about 10 stacks of these brown bills rubber banded together forming about 800 RMB in his sock drawer.

I always carry a few mao's in my wallet to pay for the bus, give exact change to taxi drivers who love keeping overages and help out my small grocer who is forced to round down most of the time.



Don't smoke!

'Nuff said. Besides saving money girls hate it.



Get a fake student ID

There are a lot of places that offer student discounts such as tourist sites, live theaters and performances. Usually this discount will save you 40-60% off the ticket price. Abuse this.

Finding fake student ID's is not hard whatsoever. Alley shopping strips will usually have a little bin scattered around that has a big pile of little red pamphlet style booklets, maybe 4-8 pages, with a spot for a photo. Slip in a passport size photo, fill it out in English and pass it along like the real McCoy.

I've also been able to use various licensing (such as gym cards from the US) as student ID's as well.

Designate money to lose when gambling

Mahjong is one of the gaming past times of China. It is set up for 4 players and I've never met a person in the country who doesn't know how to play. It is a great way to get to know coworkers, friends, new boy or girl friends and neighbors. It is also a game for gambling.

Depending on what you agree for the stakes you can lose (and you will lose) hundreds of RMB in the matter of an hour.

When you go out for a night of Mahjong take a finite amount of money with you and make it well known that your a bit of a new player compared to them and you have a budget. They'll understand and have a few chuckles at your expense. Usually the loser just pays for the table for the evening.

Don't subscribe to stuff!

One huge difference in spending habits between Chinese people and Westerners is willingness to subscribe to media services. Netflix, Hulu, podcast networks, RPG's, etc. trickle money from your wallet every month. This all sounds like \$5 here and \$5 there but at the end of the year your looking at a few hundred dollars gone.

China is notorious for not enforcing copyright laws. There are Chinese streaming sites such as Baidu Cloud, SOHU and PP TV that have thousands of US movies and televisions shows up for free but the best ever is just torrenting these shows and movies. It sounds a little wrong at first but once you realize there is no legal way to watch these shows abroad as they air (even using Netflix you have to use a VPN and spoof your location) it all becomes much easier.

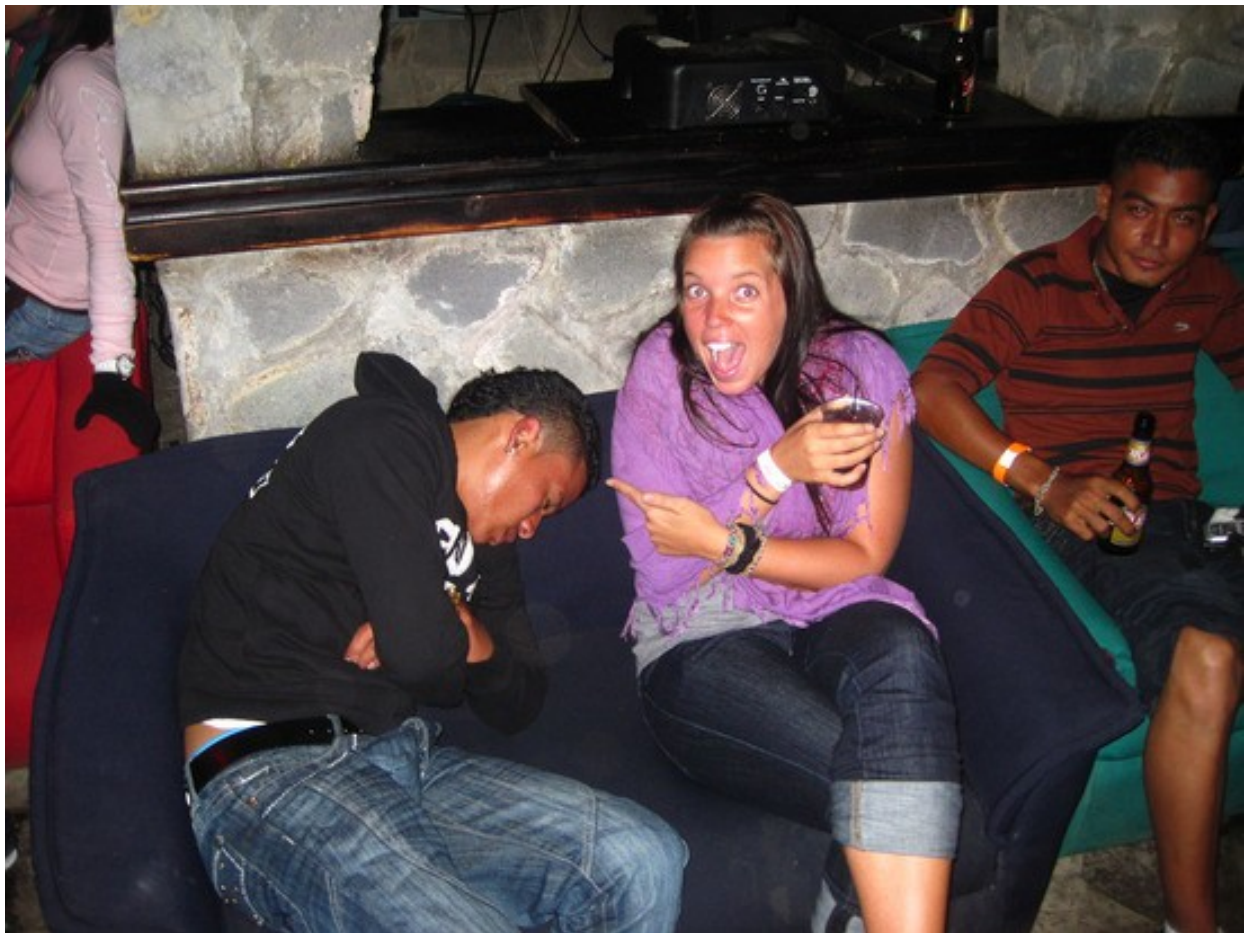
There are alternative (maybe not so legal) ways to get your media fix. I can't tell you not to subscribe to your favorite video game services but definitely find a way to manage these and restrain yourself as best you can. \$8 is a month of Netflix or a dorm bed and dinner on the beaches of Koh Rong Island in Cambodia.

Control your party

First landing in a foreign country is incredibly exciting, eye opening and can also be a bit lonely and scary. The best way I've found to make friends, network and meet people is to go out drinking and partying. Personalities loosen up and you meet friends of friends quickly.

If your anything like me its likely you moved abroad with less money than you should have. It is ok to have that one night out but always know when payday is coming which could be as much as 50 days away for your first full check. A night out on the town can be 300-1,000 RMB if your not careful, that is a massive chunk of initial moving money.

In your first 2 months keep your party in line. Be prepared to pass up a few opportunities or, better yet, invite some people over for a few beers at your home rather than going out. You may come off as the lame guy for a few weeks but it will set a habit of being thrifty and figuring out how to save money for the future.



Be prepared to say no

Most foreigners spend their money. A lot. Lots of taxi rides, lots of Western restaurants, lots of drinking and lots of poorly planned travel. I'm totally ok with admitting I get teased a lot about how cheap I am.

I have absolutely no problem saying no to something I don't want to do. My friends want to go to an Indian restaurant that I know I won't be able to eat at for less than 80 RMB so I just say I'll meet you after. I get called up at 945 when I'm already in bed for drinks and I politely say next time. There will always be a next time and saying “no” will be a huge advantage in saving money.

Exchange money at banks, not airports (and check the price)

This goes for every country. Airports have the worst exchange rates ever and I never exchange more than enough for dinner and a taxi when I land. Banks will have much better exchange rates. If your exchanging a lot of money at a time (more than \$500) you should track the currency exchange a few days before to see the trend and try to exchange on a good day.



Learn to be bored

When you first move to China you will be bored. The first week or 2 will be a whirlwind but then the grind sets in. You wake up, you eat, you work, you eat, you sleep. Friends may be a little scarce at first too. In these situations your instinct is go out and party wild. This will drain your funds fast.

Learn to be OK with being bored. Grab a book, get on a bus and ride around for an hour until it hit the final stop (usually in the countryside) and just mull about. Being bored gives you an opportunity to think and reflect. It allows you that time to appreciate where you are and what your doing. The nonstop need for entertainment has to be weaker than your urge to stack those red currency notes.



Learn Chinese!

Ordering food, haggling prices at a clothing market, giving taxi drivers accurate directions, reading bus schedules, using online coupon programs, negotiating job contracts, the list is endless with all of the ways learning Chinese can improve your standard of living and ability to control your wallet while living in China. Not only will it help you while living in China it can be a massive leg up when job hunting back home or in other countries. Luckily for you there are about 101 ways to learn Chinese.

“Chinese for Dummies” type books can usually be found laying around apartments and schools all over the place, there are Youtube and podcast series with hundreds of episode to guide you from beginning to end, obviously programs such as Duolingo and Rosetta Stone can be purchased (or found on certain websites....) and you'll have no problem practicing your language skills. Look to your Chinese coworkers as well for help and practice sessions.



Be the last one to leave

OK, this one is going to sound petty but I've saved thousands by doing this. This is my ultimate secret and keep it close to the chest. Once people catch on to you the jig is up.

Drinking and going out are staples to a good social expat diet. Birthdays, new jobs, new foreigners to town, a late work day, we find any reason possible to go out and drink as a group. The normal way of billing a group in China is to just have one large bill that we all figure out and split at the end of the night.

As people get up and leave to go home they will estimate their share but always overpay by a little to cover their bases. If their estimated bill is 180 RMB they will usually lay 200. As the night goes on you can probably figure out that there is an extra 250 or so RMB laying on the table and if you are the last one to leave there is a good chance you've covered your share of the bill and can walk out without dropping a dime.

Now, this may not be the most honest thing you can do socially but that money has to go somewhere.

Don't get a tattoo

It is not that surprising to learn that a lot of foreigners in China wind up getting a tattoo in either Chinese or a local ethnic language (Mongolian, Tibetan, etc.) at some point. It looks funky and cool (in 2003) and stamps your travels for all to see. They also have tendencies to age very badly, fade away over time and, if placed in a bad location, stop future jobs. To top it all off tattoos, next to cigarettes, are ranked as the biggest waste of money. Traveling the world creates memories to last a lifetime, no tattoo necessary to remember it.

